



connections

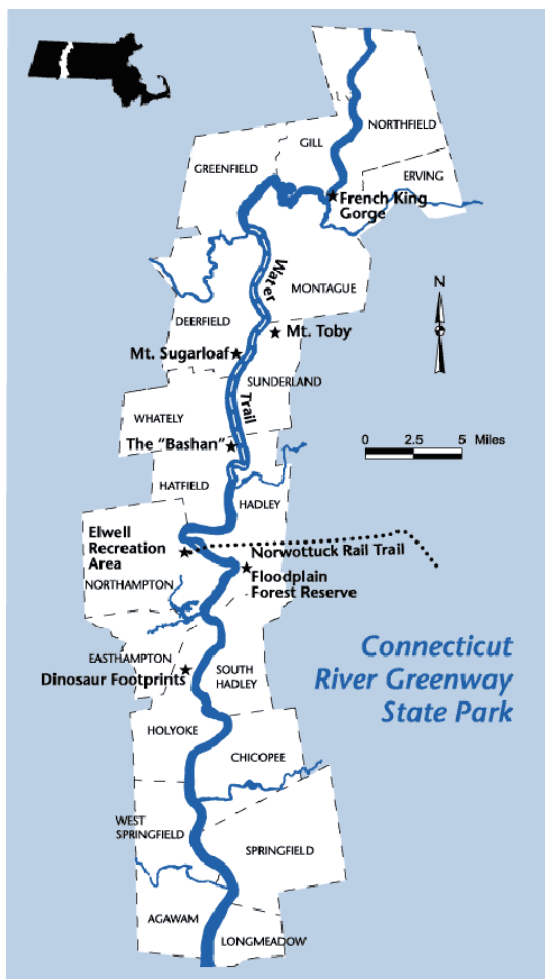
*The newsletter of the Massachusetts
Greenways and Trails Program*

April 2008, No. 18

A Vision: the Connecticut River Greenway

By Terry Blunt, Conservation Works

The concept of a greenway came late to the Connecticut River. Not until the mid 1980s did this river, New England's longest, receive much attention. More accurately, the landscapes along the river had not previously received much attention. The 1972 Clean Waters Act had, however, given great attention to cleaning up the nation's waters. It was a carrot and stick piece of legislation: Congress appropriated millions of dollars to fund clean-ups, and simultaneously required municipalities and industries to remove waste from their effluent. The Connecticut was about to receive its due.



Protecting the Water

The effects were gratifying. By the 1980's the river was beginning to show activity: recreational boating increased and fishing became more visible. A federal effort to restore Atlantic salmon habitat and increase the American shad population was underway. And, people began to regard the river landscape as real estate. What had been considered a stinky, foul resource enjoyed a new image. Property along the river began to rise in value, creating concern at the local, then regional and state levels that these resources were in jeopardy.

Protecting the Greenway

In 1984, a state open space bond dedicated 3 million dollars for acquisition of land along and near the Connecticut River. The National Park Service and Department of Environmental Management (now DCR) collaborated to create a coordinating committee representing all interests in the river and shoreline. The committee of thirty-three members included farmers, motor boaters, canoeists, sportsmen, utility executives, town appointees from the nineteen riverfront communities, and

representatives from each of the state and federal resource agencies. After teasing out differences, the diverse committee agreed - most importantly, land along the river should be acquired and permanently protected. The approach used natural characteristics and demographics to segment the river into “reaches,” with separate management plans.

Acquiring the Land

At the beginning of this effort, there was very little in the way of protected shoreline or public open land along the river, save several scattered boat launching facilities and an occasional agricultural restriction. The Connecticut travels just under 70 miles as it passes through the Commonwealth, creating about 140 miles of shoreline, and little of it was protected open space. The objective of the Connecticut Valley Action Program was to identify the most significant places along the river and secure them by outright purchase or through Conservation Restrictions.

The Target Areas

Target areas were established as priorities, recognizing that acquiring miles of shoreline would take a lot of time. As acquisition continued and the target areas were secured, the state’s ownership became large enough to be managed as a unit, and in 1996, the Connecticut River Greenway State Park was born.

Just as the “emerald necklace” encircles metropolitan Boston, the target areas created a “string of pearls” along the Connecticut River. They include such places as French King Gorge, Elwell Recreation Area, floodplain forest reserves in Hadley and Longmeadow, Paleo and Native American Indian sites, scenic viewpoints, riverine beaches, river access points, and sites of rare species.

Land acquisition efforts with the plethora of landowners along a major stream like the Connecticut is daunting. In Hatfield for example, there may be over 400 riverfront owners, in many cases each with less than 250 feet of river frontage, the result of generational splitting of properties into long lots containing river, field and woods. The flood plain reserve below Mt. Holyoke in Hadley took 12 separate acquisitions ranging from 2 to 35 acres to accumulate a contiguous block of 110 acres.



Photo by Terry Blunt

Each of the target areas can take on a stand-alone character: standing on the Wissatinewaug site in Gill overlooking the Falls and Connecticut rivers, you can imagine an encampment of Native Americans gathered to fish for salmon at the base of the falls. You can enjoy solitude on the Connecticut River Water Trail through Deerfield, Montague and Sunderland where there is little sign of housing development and protected riverfront accounts for much of

the scenery. Fishing for shad at the confluence of the Deerfield and the

Connecticut holds its own rewards, and watching for American bald eagles from Hockanum beach or biking over the River on the Norwottuck Rail Trail can be great fun.

Connections

Each protected space is of interest unto itself, but it is the sum of the parts that make up a greenway. In time, with more acquisitions and connections, the sum of these parts will take on the shape of a huge oak, the upper limbs securely connected to the trunk, all functioning together as a whole organism: that is the vision of the Connecticut River Greenway.

Tips and Tools

(Resources, links, and publications)

For more information on the **Connecticut River Greenway State Park** visit

<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/crgw.htm>.

A brochure on **Connecticut River Access Points** is at

http://www.hged.com/CT_river_access_map_web.pdf.

View the Connecticut River Valley section of *Commonwealth Connections; greenway vision for Massachusetts* at http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/greenway/pdfs/conn_river.pdf.

See the American Trails website for links to **other Massachusetts river greenways**: including the Housatonic River Walk and the Concord River Greenway at

<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/statetrails/MAstate.html>. =

Blazing the Way

With most of the state's population in the east, in or near Boston, we sometimes overlook the western trails in our state. But if you want to explore a less-traveled wilderness trail winding 35 miles across the Massachusetts, New York and Vermont borders, come explore the **Taconic Crest Trail**.

The Taconic Crest Trail originated in the minds of what became the Taconic Hiking Club in 1932. The club publication, "Rambles in the Berkshires", of that time has photographs of day hikes, the women in long skirts and heavy boots and dirt roads with unfenced pastures. The Crest Trail became a reality in 1948 and originally was 29 miles long.

Today, beginning at the highest point on Route 20 just within the Massachusetts border, the trail travels north through the Pittsfield State Forest, descends to cross Route 43 at Hancock, and then slowly climbs northwest into New York at Rounds Mountain. From here it winds between the two states, offering panoramic views of the valleys below and Mount Greylock Reservation to the east. This is the most remote portion of the trail and one can hike for hours without meeting a single person. Unfortunately, ATV damage is also encountered here, although cooperative efforts with New York's Rangers are being made to combat this.

After crossing Rt. 2 the trail goes by The Snow Hole – a 35-foot deep fissure in the slate rock. Snow can be found here late into August and provides natural air conditioning for the weary hiker. This section is by far the most popular section of the trail year-round. Hang gliders may

occasionally be seen overhead, taking advantage of the updrafts from the steep sided ridge. The trail then crosses the Southwest corner of Vermont and ends by the Hoosic River near Pownal.

For a number of years, the club has held a number of events like "The End-to-End", a biennial hiking challenge which takes hikers a total of 29 miles on the trail in one day. Successful hikers earn patches and certificates as souvenirs. Working with both Massachusetts and New York authorities, the club carries out regular trail maintenance throughout the year. Individual hikers can also earn trail patches for both winter and summer trail completions over a period of time. For information on GPS-plotted trail maps, guide books and trail work parties write to THC, 45 Kakely St, Albany, NY 12208 and check <http://taconichikingclub.blogspot.com/>.

On the Road Ahead

(Upcoming events and deadlines)

The Great Marsh Symposium: Discover a Coastal Treasure in our Backyard, April 12, 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., Parker River National Wildlife Headquarters, Newburyport. Pre-registration required, \$12, call 978-462-9998 or download registration form at www.greatmarsh.org. Experts will speak about the history of the Plum Island Airport, striped bass research, photography of the Great Marsh, archaeology, seasons on a salt marsh farm, ecological mysteries and much more.

Diversity for Environmental & Social Change Leadership Series - Session 1, Foundational Concepts, May 1-2, 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Boston. Registration forms at info@diversity-matters.org; 802-299-7317, \$350-\$495, depending on the budget of your organization. The first of a 5-part program designed to foster knowledgeable and skilled leadership to make diversity a hallmark and asset of environmental and social change efforts.

Climate Change in the Northeast: Preparing for the Future – A Workshop, June 3-5, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Contact Sarah Hines (shines@fs.fed.us) or Sheela Doshi (sdoshi@fs.fed.us) with any questions. Focusing on oceans and forests, land and resource managers in New England and New York will develop a common understanding of natural and cultural resource issues and explore climate change management approaches in the Northeast. Upon completion, participants will be able to identify effective management approaches to climate change in the Northeast. The workshop will include;

- 1) Climate change impacts, i.e., sea-level rise, hydrologic cycle changes, temperature variability;
- 2) Forecast for the ecosystems, i.e., how the landscape will look;
- 3) Implications of these changes to management agencies.

2008 National Trails Symposium, November 15-18, Little Rock, Arkansas. For more information visit www.americantrails.org/2008.

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Connections is the electronic newsletter from the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Greenways and Trails Program,

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